

Moran Announces House Passage of Legislation to Improve Access to Medical Providers in Underserved Areas

Legislation Reauthorizes Physician Recruitment Program for Five Years

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Jerry Moran today announced House passage of legislation designed to continue bringing physicians to underserved areas. The J-1 visa waiver program, set to expire on June 1, allows foreign-born, U.S.-educated physicians to serve in areas that have a shortage of physicians. The bill passed today would extend the program for five years. Moran has introduced legislation to make this law permanent and has been a lead advocate for the J-1 Visa program since his arrival in Congress.

"Americans, especially those living in rural areas or inner city neighborhoods, should not have to worry about having access to high quality medical providers," Moran said. "In many communities, the J-1 Visa Waiver program is the only reason a skilled doctor is available to provide care. I am pleased Congress continues to recognize the importance of this program. I will continue working to make it a permanent fixture in our health care system."

The J-1 visa waiver program allows international medical graduates to stay in the U.S. in exchange for three years of practicing in areas experiencing a shortage of doctors. Since 1994, more than 100 foreign doctors have served in Kansas communities through this program and more than half have continued to practice in the state following the completion of their three-year service obligation.

"We have had wonderful results with hiring J-1 doctors. It has helped us continue having quality medical providers available to area residents," Mary Sweet, Kiowa County Memorial Hospital Administrator, said. "Everyone has an expectation of having access to health care and this program enables hospitals across the state and country to do just that."

Under the program, a state is allowed to sponsor up to 30 doctors per year. Kansas allows visa waivers for primary care physicians and specialists. Primary care physicians include general medicine, internal medicine, family practice, general pediatrics, obstetrics/gynecology, emergency medicine and psychiatry.

The legislation now awaits action in the U.S. Senate. Moran is a member of the Rural Health Care Caucus in Congress.

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